

Spirit and Power

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you would take your Bible out please from the row in front of you and turn to Acts chapter 2, page 1112 or 1113, near the back.

I've never witnessed the beginning of an era. Like many of you, I have seen the Berlin Wall being torn down. And I was in a crowd of 2 million people once on New Year's Eve in the year 2000 in Sydney, Australia.

Along with 1,999,996 others, the four of us in our family went down to the Sydney Harbour to be close to the Sydney Harbour Bridge to watch the fireworks.

I thought it would be a pleasant night out. And there was a great sense of anticipation in the air. People were expecting something to happen. Well, what happened was we nearly got crushed. It's an amazing experience being in a crowd that size. You just, you cannot move and you are moved by the will of the crowd. People would pop up like sardines every now and again and then go back down.

[1 : 17] And when the fireworks began, we were so close to the Sydney Harbour Bridge that the first 30 seconds were brilliant. And then everything was covered with this acrid cloud of gunpowder smoke and we saw nothing for the rest of the night.

It was not much of an epic starter. My mother tells me the story of the day World War II finished. She was working in Sydney.

When the news came through in the morning, she, like everyone else in Sydney, ran to the centre of the city to a large open place called Martin Place.

Mum said that the atmosphere there was quite electric. It was a combination of relief and of hope and of wild joy.

Dreams and hopes were coming true. She said people sang and danced with each other and kissed each other and wept till morning because they had the sense that this was the beginning of a new era.

[2 : 21] And most of the beginnings of new epochs in recent history have had big beginnings and then have gradually come to disappoint.

In the next three weeks, as we look at this passage in Acts chapter 2, we come to the most important epoch since Jesus Christ went to heaven.

This is the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, when Jesus Christ from heaven poured out his Holy Spirit on the church as he promised he would.

It is the birth of the Christian church. It is the birth of the Christian era. It is the beginning of what God is going to do, the new age, the new era, which is going to last until Jesus Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead.

And Luke is very keen that we don't miss this. Luke, the author. Luke, the author. Luke, the author. Look at verse 1. He says, When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

[3 : 26] Literally, when the day of Pentecost was fulfilled. It's the word used for filling up a bucket of water until it overflows. This was not just the next thing on the agenda.

This is not just a coincidence or an accident. This is a fulfilment of all that Jesus has come to do, of all the promises of God in the Old Testament. The deliberate purposes of God are beginning.

And you may think this is a foolish thing for me to preach on. And you're probably right because from verse 14 onwards, the apostle Peter stands up and does a much better job than I'm going to do.

But you're going to have to come back for that next week. I want to mention his sermon because if you just cast your eyes over it, you can see it's full of quotes from the Old Testament.

And in verse 17, the apostle Peter is convinced, like the other apostles are, that the last days have begun. That is why this day of Pentecost, there is relief and hope and wild joy.

[4 : 32] Because now that the Spirit has come, we live in the last days. It's the last days of the world since the Spirit has come until Christ comes again. It is the last days of God's purposes for humanity.

It's the day of mission to the world. And that is why all the world is gathered there in Jerusalem.

Today I just want to look at the events that took place.

And Luke says that when the Spirit came, it was marked by three stunning and supernatural events. There was a sound, there was a sight and there was other speech.

Let's look at the sound for just a moment in verse 2. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind. It filled all the house where they were sitting.

Jesus has gone into heaven and now from heaven comes a sound. It isn't a wind. It is like the sound of a mighty wind. And apart from the sheer power of this, we are meant to understand that now the dream is coming true.

[5 : 41] Do you remember the passage that was read for us as our first reading today? Where the prophet Ezekiel is taken by God and in a vision he is shown a valley of human bones.

Dead, human, dry, parched bones. No hope of life. No hope of help. Beyond human possibility. It's a picture of the devastation and destruction of our sin.

And God says to the prophet Ezekiel, prophesy to the breath, to the wind, to the spirit. It's all the same word. And he does and there's a rattling in the valley and the bones come together and sinews grow and skin grows.

Prophesy again to the breath and finally God, the spirit of God, enters into the bodies and they are raised to life. It is a picture of the new era.

It's a picture of the day that will come when God will pour out his spirit and he will create a new humanity. It is nothing less than a new creation. In the very chapter before, God said to Ezekiel, a new heart I will give you, a new spirit I will put within you.

[7 : 01] I will take out that heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. I will pour my spirit within you. It is prophecy of the day when God will bring about a new creation by his Holy Spirit.

It is prophecy of this day, the day of Pentecost. But you know what? It's more than that. It's remarkable. In verse 2, the word for wind is not the usual word for spirit and wind.

It's the word for that thing that's in your nostrils and in your mouth right now. It's the word that is used in the Genesis creation account when we read that the Lord God formed man from the dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being.

Luke wants us to understand this is a new humanity. It's a new creation. The coming of the Holy Spirit is not some deluxe extra experience for those who have spontaneous tendencies.

It can't be relegated to some corner of our lives. It is our life. He is our breath. And without the spirit we are the walking dead.

[8 : 20] That's what Jesus said. Remember in John 3, he says, Don't be amazed that I say you must be born anew. The wind blows where it wills. You hear the sound of it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit. Without the Holy Spirit there is no spiritual life. There is no spiritual birth. But with the spirit the power of God is present with us to make people alive.

One of the great privileges of being a minister of the gospel is seeing the power of God at work in your lives. And although the power of God is given to the community, this new community of God's people, it is never under our control.

We know not where it comes from. We do not know where it goes to, but we know it is the power of God. So it was on that first Pentecost morning. The sound like wind signalled the coming of the Holy Spirit to make the dead alive to create a new humanity.

That's the first miracle. The second miracle is what they saw in verse 3. See, if the wind represents the power of God, the fire represents the presence of God.

[9 : 43] Again and again in the Old Testament, when God appeared and drew near to people, there was fire. When God appeared to Moses, there was a bush that was burning, although it wasn't consumed.

When God came down upon the mountain, there was a cloud of smoke because it tells us God descended in the fire. And when God led his people through the wilderness, he did so by a pillar of

fire.

And now at Pentecost, as the presence of God and the Spirit comes, each person has their own small pillar of fire. It means that this is very much more than a pleasant morning out. Because God is a God of purity and he is a God of holiness and he is a God of majesty and beauty. And the fire of his presence is not meant to be just a heartwarming experience. It's the revealing, exposing, consuming fire of his holiness. It is exactly what Luke warned us about in his gospel in chapter 3.

[10 : 45] When John the Baptist had his ministry before Jesus Christ, people came to John and said, Are you the Christ? And John said, No. He said, I baptise you with water. But he who is coming is much mightier than I.

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. It is Jesus who is baptising with the Spirit. And I need to warn you, there is a dangerous side to this. Because he is the Holy Spirit. And when he takes up dwelling within our lives, when his presence comes to us, he brings the purity of God with him so that we become the temple of God.

So that if there is compromise with spiritual disobedience, or if there is tolerance of impurity or pollution, or if there is acceptance of sin, it puts us directly in conflict with God the Holy Spirit. The fire of God's Spirit burns away our impurities as we repent and turn from them. If we hold on to them, we will drive the Spirit away from us.

[11 : 56] I never cease to tire of saying this. That is why week by week when we gather together, we begin by repenting of our sins. The Spirit has come to create a new community.

And we are meant to be marked by the burning presence of God. He hasn't come to make us happy. He's come to make us holy, which will be our true happiness. We are meant to be the place for God's dwelling.

He hasn't come to make us good. But to reveal himself and his salvation, and our life together will be marked by integrity and holiness and purity and love.

Now, this is a help, I think. If you're new to this Christianity thing, I think it helps explain why Christians take such an uncompromising attitude towards sin.

And it's because this, sin is the exact opposite to the Holy Spirit's work within us. Because sin is an attack on the majesty and the glory of God.

[13 : 00] And the work of the Holy Spirit in us is to enable us to see the vanity of the world, the emptiness of our idols, the slavery of our finances and our favourite goals, the fallacy of every security outside of him, and the beauty and the wonder, and the loveliness of Jesus Christ, who has come to die for us and to take us to be with him.

Let me put it to you this way. The mark that the Holy Spirit is alive in you and working within you is that you hate sin and you wish God would purify you and cleanse you from that sin.

And whenever you realise you have sinned, you have the humility from the Holy Spirit to face the truth, to ask him for forgiveness and for grace and ongoing cleansing. Let me put it to you this way. If sin does not bother you, you cannot possibly have the Holy Spirit in your life. If you are growing increasingly insensitive to sin, you must be resisting his work.

Let me put it to you this way. The Holy Spirit comes with the aim of destroying our cool. He comes into our personalities and sets them aflame for the glory of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 17] It's part of the essence of what it means to be a Christian, to burn with passion and heat for Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that we will suddenly become all emotional and effusive, although it may not hurt us from time to time.

I am saying that the Spirit, when the Spirit comes into someone's life, it ought to warm us up to the glory of Jesus Christ. And I think that's why the fire follows the wind.

Because once the Spirit raises us to new life, that new life progresses as we are cleansed and purified and live to serve Christ. That is the second sign, the sight.

But the third is speech. In verse 4, we read these words. So, if the wind represents the power of God and if the fire his presence, the speech represents the purpose of God for his people, through his people and for his world.

You know, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would sometimes fall upon a prophet or a king and they would speak his word. But it was occasional and temporary.

[15 : 38] Now we read in the book of Acts that all the believers, all 120 of them who are gathered, all of them are filled with the Holy Spirit. And it's important for us to understand what this means.

The book of Acts refers to this in a number of different ways. That being filled is the promise of the Spirit or the gift of the Spirit or the Spirit being poured out or the Spirit being received or the baptism of the Spirit.

And you can't neatly divide these all up and say that they're different. They're not. They're virtually interchangeable. If there's any difference, it is this, that the baptism of the Spirit is never used of a subsequent experience, whereas being filled with the Spirit happens again and again and again and again and again.

Someone once said, because we leak. You know that all Christians are commanded to be filled with the Spirit on an ongoing basis. And it is this third sign which is the most important.

It is this sign that is given the most attention. The rest of the passage is given over to it. Let me just read these words and remind you from verse 5. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

[16:52] The sound, the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were amazed and wondered saying, are not all these who are speaking Galileans, Australians?

And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and Proselytes, Cretans, Arabians.

We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God and they were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, what on earth does this mean? But others mock saying, they're drunk. Well, what is happening is this.

The Holy Spirit has filled these people and they are now speaking in tongues which are not their mother tongue. So as these people go in and out of the crowd, when they come to a group of Egyptians over here, they speak an Egyptian.

And when they come to a group of Arabs, they speak Arabian. And when they come to a group of Phrygians, they speak Phrygian. It's not a miracle of hearing.

[18:04] It's a miracle of speaking. And there's no interest in the mechanism by which it's happening. The great interest is being amazed that all of a sudden we now have genuine communication that the barriers are being swept away and that these Galileans are speaking in tongues that they've never learned.

My favourite quote from the week comes from a commentator on this. He's missed the point. Listen to this. He says, whatever form glossolalia takes, and that's the word for tongues, it appears to result from stimulation of Broca's area, the centre for articulate speech and the third frontal convolution of the dominant cerebral hemisphere.

I'd just about suck the fun out of it, wouldn't I? The point is this. The whole world is gathered.

This new community that the Holy Spirit is creating transcends racial, national, linguistic boundaries. Every nation isn't there literally, but they are representatively.

And the plan of God to spread the great news of his salvation to every corner of the earth is now the purpose of the Spirit. The reason the Holy Spirit has come upon us is not so that we as individual Christians might have a great experience of the Spirit, it's that we might be engaged in the mission of Christ to the ends of the world.

[19:23] But there's something deeper here. That list of nations in verses 9 to 11 exactly correspond to another list of nations deep within the Old Testament in the book of Genesis.

When God judged the world by sending a flood, he then resettled the world with the sons of Noah, Ham, Shem and Japheth. And as soon as the list is written, the next words we read in Genesis are these.

The world had one language and so they came together and decided to build a tower to the heavens so that they could reach up to God. And God came down and he confused their language and spread them all over the earth and the name of that place was Babel.

What is happening on this day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 is that God is reversing the curse of Babel. He is reversing the effects of sin which separate and divide.

You see, the reason that we cannot communicate with each other, the reason that we find it so hard to listen to other people, the reason we pay people to listen to us and tell us what's wrong with ourselves is not because we need to develop more skills but we need the Holy Spirit to create a new unity not based in anything in us but based in something that is outside of us in God.

[20 : 51] That's why preaching is such a waste of time unless the Spirit is in it. But if the Spirit is in it, God is uniting what we have separated. And back there at Babel there was bewilderment and confusion because the speech suddenly became unintelligible and now at Pentecost there is confusion and bewilderment because suddenly the speech is intelligible and there is communication.

It's remarkable, isn't it? The first thing that happens when the Spirit comes, the first result is that God's people speak about Jesus Christ.

That is the point of verse 11. The crowd reports to us the content of what they are saying. They are telling the mighty works of God.

They're talking about what God did in Jesus Christ, his life and his death and his resurrection because the way in which God creates this new humanity is as the Spirit fills his people.

We tell of his mighty works. Others hear and believe. Have you ever wondered why the New Testament does not bother trying to make us feel guilty about our lack of mission?

[22 : 03] It's because mission doesn't arise from guilt or a sense of obligation. Mission arises from being filled with the Holy Spirit and from nowhere else.

mission arises from being filled with the sense of the blessing of God, filled with the sense that the glory of God must cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

So, brothers and sisters, here is the birth of the Christian church, the birth of the Christian era. God is creating the most necessary and the most unique community in the world, the place for his power and his presence and his purpose, the source of blessing and hope.

Every Christian church should be the source of blessing and hope to this world. We're meant to be a Pentecostal church. And I wonder if you know the work of the Holy Spirit within you.

I wonder if you feel your life is just dry bones and whether you call out to God to pour out his Holy Spirit to give you life. I wonder if as we've looked at these words together, your heart has burned within you.

[23 : 15] You've longed for his presence. You've longed for his power. That is the mark of the Holy Spirit. And I need to ask, brothers and sisters, are we a community willing to allow God to work by his Holy Spirit?

Are we a community that is willing to allow God to be present here and with his fire to destroy our sin and our idols, to be a people who love purity and love repentance and seek after God with great heat?

Are we willing to be a missionary church, a source of blessing to others, filled with the Spirit so that we want to speak about the amazing works of God?

We want to give our time and our families and our treasure to be part of the purposes of God in these last days, to join with the people of God throughout the ages and with the Holy Spirit in creating a new community, a new humanity so that they with us will stand one day before Jesus Christ along with a great multitude that no one can number from every nation and every tribe and every people and every tongue crying out, salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

let's pray. Let's pray. Father, how we are utterly and completely dependent upon you and your work of your Holy Spirit.

[24 : 54] We are nothing without what you are doing. we praise you and thank you for your good promises. We thank you for the person of your Spirit who has been poured out and we ask, Heavenly Father, that you would fill us, each of us and this community with your Spirit that we might be the place of your power, the place of your presence and that we might be willing to be burned up for your purposes.

For your own glory we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.